JOINT BALTIC AMERICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE

REPRESENTING
ESTONIAN AMERICAN NATIONAL COUNCIL
AMERICAN LATVIAN ASSOCIATION, INC.
LITHUANIAN AMERICAN COUNCIL, INC.

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HOUSE PASSES DURBIN/KNOLLENBERG AMENDMENT!

A VICTORY FOR NATO INTEGRATION !

Striking a victory for the equitable expansion of NATO to the states of Central and East Europe, the House today passed the Durbin/Knollenberg amendment which extends NATO membership criteria to all European countries emerging from communist domination - including the Baltic states.

Previously, the National Security Revitalization Act (HR7) only established membership criteria for Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. While continuing to support the timely inclusion of the Visegrad 4, the bill now extends these criteria to other nations of Central and East Europe, thus providing a level playing field for nations seeking NATO integration. It also sends a clear signal to Russia that NATO integration will be open to all, thus denying Russia a "sphere of influence" over neighboring states.

The amendment also deletes language which called for close cooperation between NATO and Russia on security issues - clearly a "Russia-first" policy encouraged by the Administration. The amendment now states that NATO should work to strengthen other structures of security in Europe. By removing any mention of "close cooperation" with Russia, the potential for a Russian veto on NATO expansion is lessened.

The sponsors of the amendment were Congressmen Dick Durbin (D IL-20), chair of the ad-hoc Baltic Freedom Caucus, and Joe Knollenberg (R MI-11). Co-sponsors were Congressmen Benjamin Gilman (R NY-20), William Lipinski (D IL-3) and Martin Hoke (R OH-10).

Proposed under the initiative and support of the Central and East European Coalition, which unites Americans of Armenian, Belarusian, Bulgarian, Czech-Slovak, Estonian, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish and Ukrainian heritage, the amendment first faced strong opposition, which was overcome thanks to the support shown by grass-roots activists.

* JBANC would like to thank all of the Baltic-American activists who contacted their Congressman and urged their support for the Durbin/Knollenberg amendment! Your continuing support does make a difference!

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